

I'll Keep My Window Open by vikingtealight

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Summary:

Max sneaks into Lucas's room whenever her family is too much to handle because talking with him always makes her feel better.

I'll Keep My Window Open

Lucas returns from the movies with his family to find his bedroom door closed, which can only mean one thing: Max. He pauses to make sure Erica and his parents are still downstairs. Then, he taps twice on the door before quickly opening it, closing it behind him, and turning the lock.

"All clear," he says, opening the closet to find his girlfriend sitting cross legged among the t-shirts and shoes he had thrown in haphazardly the last time his mom asked him to clean his room.

"Thank god, the smell was really getting to me," Max jokes, kicking a sneaker across the closet.

"You okay?" asks Lucas.

"Yeah," says Max as she walks over to his desk and picks up his copy of X-Men #166, presumably resuming the reading she had been doing before the Sinclairs came home.

"You want to talk about it?"

"Nothing to talk about" Max shrugs.

"Okay, pass me that Spider-Man comic," says Lucas, gesturing towards the one he meant.

Lucas climbs onto his bed and opens the comic book, but he can't get into the story because he keeps glancing up at Max. He loves watching the way the light can make her hair look a thousand different shades of red and orange. She's biting her thumbnail, eyes quickly scanning the book pages, completely absorbed in the story. Lucas starts thinking about the first time Max snuck into his room, a few weeks earlier, just a couple days before the Snow Ball.

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He had been working on homework when he heard a noise and instinctively looked up to find its source. He jumped when he saw a figure crouching on his roof before realizing it was Max, knocking on

his window. He thought of how Mike used to complain about Steve Harrington sneaking into Nancy's room through her window. He added this to his mental list, "Reasons Max Might Actually Like Me Back."

"Hey, stalker," he joked, as he slid the window open.

His excitement quickly subsided as Max climbed through the window and he realized she was crying. He pulled her into a hug and asked, "what's wrong?"

Max said nothing for a minute as she gripped Lucas' waist tightly and buried her face in his shoulder. Eventually, she calmed down and leaned back, still keeping her arms around Lucas.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't believe I did this."

"It's okay," said Lucas. "But are you? Okay, I mean?"

"Yeah, it's just... my step-dad and Billy were fighting again and I just couldn't take being in that house for one more second," Max seemed to suddenly realize her arms were still around Lucas and abruptly dropped them.

"I'm sorry," said Lucas, putting his arms down as well.

"There's nothing for you to apologize for, Lucas," said Max as she rubbed the last of her tears from her cheeks.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he asked.

She bit her thumbnail and nodded.

So, they sat on the floor under Lucas's window and Max told him all things she'd been hinting at on the roof of the bus before the demodog attack. How her step-father and Billy were yelling at each other. And how this was a regular occurrence. And how it had gotten physical, which was also a pretty regular occurrence. She told him how she locked herself in her room but couldn't stop feeling terrified, even though Billy mostly left her alone now. She said she always feared the day Neil's anger would be directed not at Billy, but at her or her mother. She told him how mad she felt at her mom for

marrying Neil. How mad she felt at her father for letting Neil take her. It was like she couldn't stop talking once she'd started.

Eventually, she ran out of serious problems and began complaining about annoying, yet inconsequential things, like how skating to the arcade would be easy if it weren't for the giant hill on Tanner Lane or how much Dragon's Lair costs. She started telling him all the things she missed about California, and Lucas kept making jokes in the surfer voice he used to say "totally tubular." Max couldn't help but laugh every single time.

"And the weather, I miss the weather, obviously," said Max.

"Yeah, I get that, you've looked cold every second of the day since Thanksgiving break," said Lucas. "You know it's going to get worse right? We haven't even gotten real snow yet."

"I'd never seen snow before moving to Hawkins," Max admitted.

"Well, then you still haven't seen snow," Lucas laughed. "Frost on the grass that's gone by lunchtime doesn't count."

"Oh great, I can't wait for the real snow then."

"Hey, the cold sucks, but there are some advantages."

"Oh yeah, like what?"

"There's snow days, and you never sweat, and you get to go sledding—oh, and ice skating, you're a zoomer, so you've got to like ice skating," said Lucas, excitedly.

"I've been ice skating," said Max. "There are ice rinks in California, you know"

"Skating on an ice rink is nothing compared to skating on a frozen lake," argued Lucas.

"You're right, there's a much lower risk of death at ice rinks."

"Exactly, all the thrill is gone."

Max rolled her eyes, but she was still smiling.

“Anything else?” asked Max.

“My mom makes the best hot chocolate,” said Lucas “You’ll have to try it.”

“I’d like that,” Max smiled even bigger.

“You should probably come through the front door for that occasion,” teased Lucas.

“I think I can manage that.”

“But my window’s open anytime you need it.”

“Thanks, Lucas.”

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Max’s voice brings him back into the present.

“Stop staring,” she says, widening her eyes in a way that Lucas thinks looks adorable.

“Sorry,” says Lucas. “It’s just... nevermind.”

“Come on, Lucas, what is it?” asks Max, setting down the X-Men comic.

“It’s just I was thinking about how lucky I am that you’re my girlfriend and how lucky I am that you’re here in my room right now, but then I started feeling guilty because the only reason you’re here is that you can’t be at home. And that makes me a jerk because that means I’m happy that your stepdad and step-brother are assholes.”

“Wow, that started really sweet and then you ruined it with that illogical conclusion.”

“It was completely logical!”

“Yes, sure it was. I know you’re not happy about how terrible my family is,” Max smiles and shakes her slightly. “It’s okay for you to

enjoy spending time with me, you know? I think you're supposed to seem as I'm your girlfriend. Seriously Lucas, if you *didn't* like me being here, then we'd really have a problem."

Lucas nods, knowing that she's right, but he still feels a little bit guilty.

"Mike and El talk on their walkie-talkies every night," Max says. "If my family wasn't... like they are, we'd be doing that too, so in the long-run me crashing at your place once a week just kind of evens it all out."

"So you think we'd call each other every night, huh?" asks Lucas, smiling.

"Of course," says Max. "And you know I don't just come over here when I need to escape my family."

"No?"

"Yeah, it's Friday night, my mom and stepdad went out and Billy's on a date too," Max says with a disgusted look on her face. "I was serious when I said there was nothing to talk about."

"So you're here just because you wanted to spend time with me?" asks Lucas.

"Yes, are you surprised?"

"No, but if you're here for me, you'd better put down that X-Men, and tell me on that new skateboarding trick you've been working on," says Lucas. "Because given the choice between comic books and talking with you, you win every time."

"First of all, it's called an ollie, but for the record," Max smiles. "I'd pick you every time too."